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Written statement* submitted by Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[26 May 2014]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Statement on the Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women to the Human Rights Council on India

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom welcomes Rashida Manjoo's visit to India and her close collaboration with civil society.

Despite the existence of a solid legislative framework to protect women against violence, this crime continues to be widespread, both in the home and in the public space.

As the report highlights, structural and institutional inequality persisting in India is the major cause of the various forms of violence against women. In particular, the presence of a militarised society constitutes a serious threat to women's safety and empowerment.

Militarism entails a series of policies, practices and cultural values that push forward militaristic values such as rigid hierarchal distributions of power, masculine authority, obedience, the use of violent force, and identification of internal values in opposition to an "enemy other".

It goes beyond mere questions related to the army, but penetrates into every layer of society, influencing gender roles and relationships, even during peacetime, by reinforcing patriarchal values through discourses that subordinate women and highlight gender inequality.

More directly militarism contributes to an increasing insecure environment, especially, but not exclusively, in militarised regions.

The rise in gun culture is a main component of this insecurity that hinders women's right to freedom of movement for fear of being subjected to violence and contributes to a more generalised culture of violence against women. India is currently the largest importer of arms in the world[1] and is constantly increasing defense spending. The standard set by the government is filtering into civilian culture, and is fueling a significant increase in private gun ownership and a culture of violent masculinity.

When we also consider the institutional barriers women face when attempting to access the justice system giving way to impunity, the rise in gun culture in India presents a key challenge for the prevention of violence against women. It has been found that men who use weapons are far more likely to participate in (non-partner) rape, and gang rape. Evidence has demonstrated that owning a gun makes someone more, not less vulnerable to a lethal attack, particularly within the home, the most common site of violence against women. While men are much more likely to perpetrate and fall victim to gun violence, many more women than men are killed, injured and intimidated by firearms in the context of domestic violence. This evidence suggests that the increase of private gun ownership is likely to result in more frequent, and more lethal violence against women.

Besides increasing the likelihood of violence, gun culture creates an atmosphere of impunity and normalised acceptance.

[1] Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2013). *SIPRI Yearbook 2012: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*. Published in print and online by Oxford University Press

WILPF would also like to highlight the ongoing problem of weapons trafficking in the Northeastern states. Evidence suggests the trafficking of persons, and patterns of gender based and sexual violence follow the same trafficking paths as small arms along the Burmese border.

The central and state government have adopted militarised responses, armed violence and arms trafficking, which are fueling an increased climate of insecurity and distrust of the national government. We urge engagement with local women's peace and disarmament movements, and the articulation of a clear policy of armed violence reduction in the Northeast. Such an approach must include the repeal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act of 1958 and a clear process of de-militarisation, and the implementation of the Justice Verma Report's[2] recommendations on the prevention of violence against women in the Northeast, as the Special Rapporteur's report suggests.

Although the state is resistant to the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, there is a growing national pressure to address the situation of women in armed conflict and the institutions of the state that foster women's insecurity. The Justice Verma Report, although not specifically mentioning UNSCR 1325, addresses core aspects of the Women Peace and Security agenda, including protection (from violence), prosecution (of perpetrators), the deployment of high level-gender experts to conflict zones, gender training for all personnel stationed in conflict areas, and an immediate review of AFSPA.

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[2] The Justice Verma Committee, headed by former Justice of India, JS Verma, was established after the Delhi gang rape in 2012 to review India's criminal law for sexual crimes.